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SUBJECT: IRANIAN PRESIDENT VISITS MUSCAT

REF: MUSCAT 441

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (U) Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad arrived in Muscat from the UAE on the afternoon of May 14 for a two-day official visit to Oman. He was accompanied by a delegation of ten Iranian officials, including Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, Minister of Labor Mohammed Jahromi and Minister of Oil Vaziri Hamaneh, in addition to members of the Iranian press. Ahmadinejad was welcomed at the airport by Omani Deputy Prime Minister Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al-Said, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Yusef bin Alawi and other senior Omani officials, and escorted directly to the Al Alam palace. Sultan Qaboos personally greeted Ahmadinejad upon his arrival at the palace and escorted him to the "Dais of Honor" where a band played the Iranian national anthem, followed by the firing of a 21-gun salute.

12. (U) According to local press reports, Ahmadinejad and his delegation conducted talks with the Sultan at the palace on the "latest developments in the regional and international arenas," as well as on ways to strengthen bilateral ties and to expand trade. The following Omani officials joined the Sultan for these discussions: Sayyid Saud bin Ibrahim al-Busaidi, Minister of Interior; Yusef bin Alawi, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs; Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al-Rawas, Advisor to the Sultan for Cultural Affairs; Maqbool bin Ali Sultan, Minister of Commerce and Industry, Juma bin Ali bin Juma, Minister of Manpower; and Yahya al-Araimi, Oman's ambassador to Iran.

13. (U) Outside the palace, Ahmadinejad met with Omani and Iranian businessmen at the Iranian Embassy on May 14 to highlight economic and trade relations between the two countries. Accompanied to the event by Minister Maqbool and the chairman of the Omani Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Salim bin Said al-Ghattami, Ahmadinejad encouraged the private sectors in both Oman and Iran to take advantage of the "huge" opportunities for joint economic cooperation, particularly in the fields of communications, industry, energy, and technical and engineering services.

14. (U) To end the first day of Ahmadinejad's visit, Sultan Qaboos hosted a formal dinner in honor of the Iranian President and his delegation at the Al Alam palace. The dinner was attended by a large number of prominent Omanis -- including government officials, senior palace advisors, tribal sheikhs, and members of the Omani State Council (Majlis al-Dawla) and Omani Shura Council (Majlis al-Shura) -- in addition to members of the diplomatic corps. Ahmadinejad spent the night at the Al Alam palace guest house; other delegation officials were lodged at the Shangri-la Barr al Jissah resort.

15. (U) Prior to leaving Oman on May 15, Ahmadinejad met

separately with the President of the Majlis al-Shura, Foreign Minister bin Alawi, and Grand Mufti Ahmad bin Hamad al-Khalili who also led Ahmadinejad on a tour of the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. Meanwhile, Omani Commerce Minister Maqbool and Iranian Oil Minister Hamaneh signed an agreement in front of press on the proposed joint development of an off-shore oil and gas field near the Strait of Hormuz. Ahmadinejad and his delegation were seen off at the airport by the Sultan and departed at approximately 14:00.

¶6. (C) Comment: The plans for Ahmadinejad's visit to Muscat were changed several times in advance of his arrival. Originally scheduled for two days beginning May 12, the visit was later reduced to a several-hour stop before expanding into the final itinerary. Similar to the visits of Arab heads-of-state, the local press published several editorials lauding Oman-Iran relations in advance of the Iranian President's arrival, although journalists later griped that they were denied direct access to the Iranian delegation. Ahmadinejad's engagement with business leaders at the Iranian embassy, and the presence at the palace talks of Oman's Minister of Manpower (who rarely attends such high-level discussions), indicates the emphasis placed on economic, labor (i.e. Iran's desire to supply Oman with workers and professionals) and visa issues, although trade between Oman and Iran remains sluggish (reftel). Post will attempt to supply a readout of Ahmadinejad's talks with Omani government officials septel. End comment.
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